

## ■ *business profile*

*In an exclusive for Container Management, Kamal Hassan interviews Mohammed Al Muallem, DP World's senior vice-president and managing director for the UAE, who discusses how the company has evolved its business model to become a market leader*

# Innovation



Mohammed Al Muallem

**DP World is a relatively young organisation that has established itself as a leader in port management. What is the reason for its success?**

**Mohammed Al**

**Muallem:** Although established in November 2005, our roots go back to Port Rashid in the early 1970s when containerisation started. Dubai has always been visionary and we looked to see how to meet this challenge and create a win-win situation for all concerned.

Port Rashid built a new container terminal, the first in the region. This was followed in the late 1980s by Jebel Ali Port, with the ports merging in 1991 to become the Dubai Port Authority (DPA).

Our customers wanted the flexibility of Dubai's

business culture elsewhere and questioned why we were not operating in neighbouring countries. So we created Dubai Port International, which became involved in projects outside Dubai – the first in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

We soon realised the value of being a global player and, more importantly, started understanding the whole supply chain process. We knew we needed to expand beyond Jeddah, but at that time there was no specific model for acquisitions.

We had two choices: either seek major acquisitions or build slowly, step by step. We decided to grow fast. Our acquisition of CSX made us global: Asia, South America, Australia and Europe. After that, the acquisition of P&O made us the third largest cargo port operator in the world, a position we still retain.

All our acquisitions have resulted in an exchange of knowledge and technologies; we exported the 'Dubai Culture' to other countries but, also, we imported ideas from others.

In 2010 we handled 49.6m teu across our global portfolio of 50 operating terminals in 28 countries, an increase of

14% on 2009. We are growing fast and want to be number one in the world; that is the goal driving our expansion into different regions.

**Is DPW still in the port management business or something more?**

**AM:** We want to complement our customers, not compete with them. We don't own shipping lines but are in the cargo handling and logistics supply chain management business. This is shaping our company and innovation strategy and helping us maintain a strong position in the market.

**How have you personally contributed to DPW's success and influenced the landscape of port management globally?**

**AM:** I started as a trainee at Port Rashid in 1983, then became an engineer, a technical manager and senior manager, before becoming deputy director, technical director and, now, senior VP and managing director.

Through these roles I have seen the technical and business sides of port management, which allows

me to take a "total system" approach to running the business and even extending that to the market as a whole.

**What do you mean by "total system" approach?**

**AM:** DPW is a major player, influencing business models and the global supply chain. The main market driver is speed through process automation and optimisation. But the big question is how to change the way the market operates currently.

Previously everything was done manually, with each stakeholder in the process running their business separately, requiring customers to have different documents for each process.

In Dubai we pushed these stakeholders – customs, the port and truckers – to integrate and automate their systems. We designed 'Dubai Trade', an automated online system that has made the process easier and much quicker, enabling customers to pay their duties and clear goods through the port.

Our commitment is to making this process the best it can be. We were the first with this type of automation and 70% of our customers use the

